



# WASHINGTON RAIL NEWS

APRIL/MAY 2006

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Publication of the Washington Association of Rail Passengers  
A Not-for-profit Consumer Organization  
"Moving forward...On Rail."

## WashARP members hear from Sen. Swecker; join regional rail advocates in Havre, MT

At our Feb. 11 WashARP meeting in Lacey we were welcomed by Lacey city Councilman Graeme Sackrison and Olympia Mayor Mark Foutch.



Sen. Dan Swecker

Sen. Dan Swecker (R-Rochester) praised Lloyd Flem and WashARP for our support of the transportation tax packages passed by the Legislature

in 2003 and 2005. The senator noted that he is no longer ranking Republican on the Transportation Committee as he is attending The Evergreen State College for a masters degree in environmental studies. He praised the entire state rail program, including freight rail, Amtrak station restorations, the *Cascades* service and the grade-separation program.

Also attending the meeting was state Transportation Commissioner Carol Moser of Richland. She discussed the statewide rail capacity and systems needs study the commission is conducting. Moser lived in Norway at one time for eight months and used only public transit to get around. Having served as a Richland city councilwoman and having worked for Sealand, she came to understand the importance of rail service. "We have a mobility deficit in the United States," Moser said. For information on the rail study visit [www.wstc.wa.gov/Rail/](http://www.wstc.wa.gov/Rail/). Click on the regional listening sessions link for opportunities to provide you input later in April, or use the interactive feedback page.

Ken Uznanski, WSDOT Rail Office manager, also spoke. He praised Lloyd as a "tremendous, dedicated, selfless leader in rail." Uznanski outlined many of the passenger rail infrastructure projects coming in the next several years. He stated that on-time performance in the corridor is unacceptable. In 2005 it averaged 60%; the goal is 80%. So far this year it's no better. Uznanski blamed the problem on increased freight train traffic and poor dispatching

by inexperienced BNSF dispatchers. He said they are discussing this issue with the railroad as well as the unjustifiable 48-hour shutdowns of passenger service whenever there is even the tiniest mudslide.

On Mar. 25, WashARP members joined rail advocates from Oregon, Montana and Idaho in Havre, MT for our annual joint membership meeting with NARP Region 8. With 65 people in attendance, we were welcomed by Havre Mayor Bob Rice. MontanaARP president Jim Green acted as emcee.

Sen. Conrad Burns (R) addressed the gathering via a video, stating he is working to provide secure and adequate funding for Amtrak. Sen. Max Baucus (D) was represented by Christina Davis, his field director. She said Sen. Baucus, as senior Democrat on the Finance Committee, will also continue his fight for proper funding for Amtrak.

David Jacobs, representing the Mont. DOT, was also a speaker. He stated the DOT supports full funding for intercity passenger rail service. He reiterated that the *Empire Builder* is a lifeline for northern Mont. The state has received federal funding to support intercity bus service. While the money can't be used to support rail service, it can be used to provide feeder service to the *Builder*. DOT is looking to reestablish bus service from Great Falls to Shelby and possibly adding routes that would connect to other

### King St. Station turns 100!

May 10, 2006 marked the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the opening of Seattle's King St. Station. WSDOT, Amtrak, Sound Transit, BNSF and the city of Seattle plan a series of events between May 10 and July 1 to mark the centennial. The May 10 event will revolve around the unveiling of a J. Craig Thorpe painting of the station. There will also be a series of brown bag lunches at various location around downtown Seattle. The centennial celebration will conclude with a major event on July 1 to coincide with the launch of the fourth daily Amtrak *Cascades* round-trip between Seattle and Portland. For details of the upcoming events, search on King Street Station Centennial for the soon-to-be-up website. Though station restoration won't be finished for the centennial, work will be completed in the coming years.

cities served by Amtrak.

Representing Amtrak was Mark Magliari, from media relations in Chicago. The first thing Magliari said was that Am-



Mark Magliari

trak is in a fairly positive position in 2006 because of steps former Amtrak President David Gunn took during his brief tenure to reduce costs while holding service quality the same or improving it.

He noted, however, that Amtrak still has hard work ahead to meet mandates placed on it by Congress and the administration. The new simplified dining car service being implemented on all long distance trains, except the *Builder* and *Auto Train*, is a result of Congress' demand to cut food service losses. The major point of customer dissatisfaction continues to be on-time performance. Some railroads, such as BNSF, get it and work to properly operate Amtrak trains. It's a point of corporate pride to earn the incentive payments. Other railroads, such as Union Pacific, have little regard for proper operation of Amtrak trains. Magliari noted that Congress has not been able to pass an Amtrak reauthorization for over three years. That (See **Havre**, page 4)



Train 7/27, the westbound *Empire Builder*, arrives Havre on March 26. About forty NARP Region 8 meeting attendees traveled to and from Havre via the *Builder*. Photo by Jim Hamre



*From the Executive Director's Desk by Lloyd H. Flem*

### Rail in 2006: Mostly Good News

**Washington Rail News**, like WashARP, has traditionally focused on intercity passenger trains, with added concern with urban rail. But we have not ignored freight rail, either mainline or shortline. WashARP is increasing our freight rail advocacy, believing a healthy freight rail industry is essential to passenger rail and, in any case, is highly beneficial to our state and country.

Freight rail is undergoing an increase in importance and prosperity unprecedented in recent decades. American freight trains are hauling more ton-miles of goods than at anytime in history. Several economic factors are persuading shippers to again, or for the first time, consider the rail mode for the movement of materials and products. And our Northwest ports are undergoing a boom based upon a vast increase in consumer goods from the Far East.

Wall Street is responding. The stock values of the Class One railroads (BNSF, UP in the Northwest) have more than doubled in the last two years. The general business media, not just the rail press, are featuring rail topics once again.

While this is good news for investors in rail, the railroad industry, rail labor, shippers and receivers of goods, and the communities served, the (hopefully temporary) downside is that congestion on parts of the existing rail infrastructure has brought about poorer on-time performance of our passenger trains. The Amtrak *Cascades* north of Portland run on the tracks of the BNSF Railway, which has made a credible effort to run those passenger trains on time. (The railroad does get bonus monies for fostering on-time Amtrak trains.) But in recent months even those trains hosted on BNSF tracks have been late to the point of inhibiting riders for whom reasonable timeliness is important. The *Coast Starlight*, Amtrak's once-premier long distance train, has steadily lost ridership as its on-time performance, on UP tracks south of Portland to Los Angeles, is now the poorest of any Amtrak train nationally.

To the freight railroads' credit, after decades of track and infrastructure abandonment, they are again adding physical capacity. Significant increases in revenue, which is good news, has allowed rail expansion once again. Most informed observers also believe it is strongly in the public interest for the public sector to co-invest with the private railroads in their rail infrastructure. Our state has been a national leader in this process, with public monies invested in rail capacity which allows both Amtrak *Cascades* and Sound Transit Sounder trains to run on the BNSF right-of-way, sharing the tracks with freight trains.

While adding physical capacity through both private and public investment is needed to allow increased volume of freight and passenger service, better operational practices lead to more efficient operation, thus allowing more

***Freight rail is undergoing an increase in importance and prosperity unprecedented in recent decades. American freight trains are hauling more ton-miles of goods than at anytime in history.***

trains to utilize whatever capacity is available. I trust the state's ongoing Rail Capacity Study, under direction of the Washington State Transportation Commission, with it's excellent consultant team, will bring forth ideas that can result in greater rail infrastructure productivity.



The American public wants a larger role for rail in the transportation of both freight and passengers. A recent Harris poll showed decided preferences for rail over either truck or air for the movement of goods. Similarly, rail was seen as a first choice for passenger investments, though not as strong a preference as that for freight. Most Americans are on "our side" in terms of transportation policy. But we, the organized rail advocacy community, need to take the lead in educating and persuading policy makers to move more in the direction of rail.



All rail advocates from Oregon and Washington who attended the recent NARP Region 8 annual meeting in Havre traveled to that north-central Montana city on Amtrak's *Empire Builder*. The *Builder* has now emerged as Amtrak's finest "National Network" train. While some traveled from Seattle and Portland (the two legs of the *Builder* join in Spokane after midnight) straight to Havre, more than a half dozen of us left a day earlier

and stayed for 24 hours at the Izaak Walton Inn, a delightful traditional Great Northern railroad hotel immediately adjoining the south boundary of Glacier National Park. We enjoyed hiking the well-groomed snowy trails, watched trains on the BNSF northern tier mainline, played Ping-Pong, listened to 1940s swing music, soaked in the very railroady ambience, had good meals, and just relaxed before resuming the trip east to the Great Plains city of Havre.

Most meeting attendees took Havre's underground tour, which I found frankly better than the more famous Seattle version. An early-20<sup>th</sup> century fire forced many Havre businesses to literally move underground for more than a decade during the rebuilding, essential given the severity of the area's climate.

While most passengers properly marvel at such environmental features as the Cascade Mountains, the Columbia River and gorge, and the Rockies, train riders should also note the works of mankind, past and present: irrigation agriculture in the Columbia Basin, dry land strip farming of wheat between Cut Bank and Havre (and farther

east), and disappearing villages. James J. Hill, founder of the Great Northern Railroad and for whom the *Empire Builder* is named, originally set up small market and grain gathering towns every seven miles along his tracks in North Dakota and Montana. This reflected the agricultural and transportation technologies of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. GN was key to the survival of these villages and small towns, which provided basic services for the surrounding agricultural hinterland and were the assembly locations for shipping the grain to market on the railroad. My late grandfather managed the grain elevator in Petersburg, ND in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. With modern scales of economy of agricultural production and transportation, these settlements can now be much further apart than was the case a century ago. As one travels through this productive countryside on the *Empire Builder*, one can see the bittersweet reality of many no-longer-economically-necessary small towns. On the train one can also see the Real World as created by God and human beings.

*Due to several events that developed in recent weeks, this newsletter is only four pages. The usually six-page newsletter will return in June.*

# TANSTAAFL:\* A Semi-Satirical Look at a World Without Transportation Subsidies (Part 3)

By Tony Trifiletti

## An Economy Based on Trucks

When you graph the equation of the damage done to a highway by truck weight, the equation is exponential to the fourth power. But when you look at the tonnage fees charged by the states, they tend to be linear, not turning exponential until you reach the higher weights. This is a subsidy to the trucking industry and prompts a cry of "TANSTAAFL!"

So as part of our thought experiment, let's put those transponders in trucks. This transponder will know whether a truck is empty, half full, full or overweight. There will no longer be a need for those weigh stations by the side of the freeway – whoops, limited access highway – staffed by the state patrol. If a truck is overweight, it will send a signal to our antenna, and within minutes a state patrol SWAT team will pull the truck over.

The transponder also knows how fast the truck is going. You'll never again have to worry about a section of superhighway posted "Speed Limit 70, Trucks 60" where the trucks are tailgating you at 75 miles per hour.

The effects of eliminating all subsidies to the trucking industry will be dramatic. People have always said, "I wish they could get all those trucks off the highway." Now they will have their wish, and it will happen because the interstate trucking companies went out of business overnight. In a world without subsidies, it makes more sense to have a short-haul crew take the truck to a railhead, strap it onto a railcar, haul it by train to another railhead, and have another short-haul crew take the truck to its final destination. This will work very well for shipments that are not time-sensitive. But it will wreak havoc on the greatest time-sensitive trade of all B America's food supply.

\*TANSTAAFL: "There ain't no such thing as a free lunch!"

Sixty years ago America's railroads hauled the nation's food. But as the interstate highways were built and the trucking industry's subsidies increased, trucks took over delivery of the nation's food. Over a forty year period, America's railroads disinvested and tore out their physical plant. To return to a point where the railroads could again ship the lion's share of our food would take at least a decade. Today the railroads don't even earn the cost of their capital, but in a world governed by TANSTAAFL the railroads will have no problem raising the money to rebuild. However, during that decade we will still be required to use trucks to deliver our food.

The supermarket economy that grew up in the years after World War II was driven by the expansion of the highway network via the interstates. Supermarkets grew and expanded because deliveries by truck grew and expanded, which happened because the interstates grew and expanded. In a supermarket economy, America could grow its wheat in South Dakota and its corn in Kansas. It could spend billions to irrigate three desert valleys in California to turn them into vegetable gardens. It could raise its cattle in Texas, its chickens in South Carolina and its hogs in Arkansas. By using the interstates – America's new, subsidized distributed highway transportation network – these goods could be transported thousand of miles to the aisles of America's supermarkets.

Take the subsidies away and the price of food skyrockets overnight. Lettuce or carrots raised in the San Joaquin Valley will now reflect the full cost of moving those vegetables thousands of miles by truck. And think of the price of meat! When you hear about a politician holding a \$500 a plate dinner, you know it's because he's serving meat. You'll know you're in trouble when you turn on "Oprah" and see some lady with a school-marmish voice explaining that an equal weight of lentils or Portobello mushrooms contains just as much protein as steak. Try telling that to America's carnivores! When the cost of hamburger rises to the cost of *filet mignon*, it's goodbye McDonald's and Burger King.

Smart shoppers will forsake the super-

market for the corner butcher shop that sells meat raised and slaughtered locally. They will turn to the farmers' market or the corner greengrocer for locally grown produce. And where will this food be grown? On the land in the far suburbs once occupied by those McMansions, now torn down to make way for local agriculture.

Truck manufacturers will go bankrupt. No longer will a trucker travel down to Florida to get his Peterbilt. Freight railcar manufacturers will make billions, and America's great agricultural areas, dependent on the distributed highway transportation network, will go to seed for a decade.

## Air

Having applied the principle of TANSTAAFL to cars and trucks, it's only fair to apply it to the airlines. There is a large, government-owned-and-operated air traffic control system, which we sell off to private industry. The airports built and run by states, localities and port authorities also go on the block. Airlines are required to own and operate airports the same way the railroads operated union stations two generations ago. Goodbye cheap air fares.

People now take long distance passenger trains again, but they are not operated by Amtrak, which has been sold off. (TANSTAAFL!) The Class I railroads now run the passenger trains, charging what the market will bear and making a profit. It's not cheap to travel by train, but it's cheaper than traveling by air and competitive with traveling by auto.

## Cause and Effect

Having led you down the garden path, I now deposit you at the gates of hell. Let's take a look at what the strict application of the principle of TANSTAAFL has wrought.

- America's highways are empty.
- People have crowded back into the cities, taking public transportation rather than driving.

(See TANSTAAFL, page 4)



## The View Down the Tracks

Jim Cusick's column will return in the next issue of Washington Rail News.

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# WashARP News

**May 13:** WashARP meeting at **12:45 p.m.** at **Andy's Diner**, 2963 4th Ave. S., **Seattle** (just north of Spokane St.; on Metro routes 23 and 174, and near the busway).

**May 18:** Commuter Rail Group meeting at **6:30 p.m.** at **Andy's Diner**, 2963 4<sup>th</sup> Ave. S., **Seattle** (transit information above).

**June 10:** WashARP meeting at **noon** at the **Centennial Center**, 719 East 3<sup>rd</sup> St., **Cle Elum**. Lunch will be Caesar salad and brie-Italian sausage pasta. Cost is \$12 per person at the door. Cash or check only, please.

WashARP welcomed the following new members in January, February and March: Richard Taylor, Bellevue; Allan Parker, Seattle; Sidney McHarg, Anacortes; Mary Patterson, Seattle; Lori van Zanten, Olympia; David Enger, Kirkland; Bruce Whitehouse, Olympia; Sarah Wall, Mossyrock; and John & Margaret Dragseth; Bedminster, NJ.

WashARP members contributing to this newsletter include: Ron Sheck, Dan McFarling, Louis Musso, Rocky Shay, Tony Trifiletti, and Lloyd Flem.

## TANSTA AFL from page 3

- Automobile ownership is only for the wealthy.
- Flying is only for the wealthy.
- Agribusiness has yielded to the family farm.
- Trains are everywhere, and railroad bonds have higher Moody's ratings than US government bonds.
- The far suburbs have reverted to farmland.
- People buy their meat and produce at small community-based stores.

When was the last time we saw an America that looked like this? If your answer is the Great Depression, you're close but no cigar. The line of demarcation for this world is 1919.

In that fateful year, US Army Major Dwight Eisenhower took a military convoy across the country via America's existing road network, which at the time consisted of dirt and gravel roads with little connectivity. Rivers were ferried or forded, not bridged. Eisenhower took the press along for the thirty day trip in an attempt to show America just how far behind Europe we were in our road building. Press reporting on the trip galvanized public discussion, and our great road building efforts began in that year.

The world I just described is pre-Eisenhower, specifically 1910 to 1917, the year we entered World War I. Armed with nothing more than a desire to eliminate all transportation subsidies, a GAAP manual and my mighty Excel spreadsheet, I've succeeded in wiping out an entire century of American progress. Let's hear it for me!

### Harsh Reality

Of course the real world of transportation has subsidies. If automobile drivers don't pay their fair share, why should passengers on public transportation? If bus and airline passengers don't pay an unsubsidized rate, why should train passengers? If we subsidize one mode of transportation but not another, people will use the subsidized mode until it can't handle the traffic.

I notice people saying, "I thought he was a conservative Republican. He sounds like a socialist."

It's not socialism to insist on a level playing field for all modes of transportation; it is in fact one of the pillars of capitalism. We can eliminate all subsidies and go back to the days of hobble skirts, stiff collars and five-cent cigars. Or we can accept the existence of transportation subsidies and ask that they be applied in a balanced fashion to support a balanced transportation system. Cars, buses, trains and planes all have their places. It's important that we let each mode work where it will perform best.

(See the December 2005/January 2006 Washington Rail News for part 1 and the February/March 2006 issue for part 2. Pres. Trifiletti delivered this paper at the Feb. 2005 WashARP meeting. The entire paper can be viewed at [www.washarp.org/tanstaaf1.htm](http://www.washarp.org/tanstaaf1.htm).)

### Havre, from page 1

puts the appropriations committees in a much more difficult position when trying to properly fund the railroad. Much of Magliari's presentation was drawn from Amtrak's 2007 grant request to Congress. It can be viewed at [www.amtrak.com/pdf/FY07GrantLegislativeRequest.pdf](http://www.amtrak.com/pdf/FY07GrantLegislativeRequest.pdf).

The evening wrapped up with a rousing presentation from NARP President George Chilson. He was



George Chilson

impressed with the large turnout in a rural area. We must be united to be effective and must become more involved in the political process, he said. Rail advocates can take some credit for going from the president's \$0

to \$1.3 bill. for Amtrak in 2006. We must unify on a common message: **modern rail; national scope; public funding.** Chilson asked: Why is the return of the *Sunset Limited* along the Gulf coast important to Montana? Because a weaker *Sunset* could be eliminated, which could bring the end of the *Texas Eagle*, which would hurt all trains running out of Chicago. He said we need transportation reform, not USDOT Secretary Mineta's "Amtrak reform." Chilson said all transportation is political. No one really understands why the administration puts so much effort into trying to eliminate a tiny but highly popular part of the federal budget, but because of this it's up to Congress to lead the way. A perfect storm is approaching: worsening congestion, skyrocketing oil prices, the funding mechanism for highways is collapsing and our addiction to oil is now recognized as a national security threat. And rail is an important part of the solution to all these issues.

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